Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 ROME 18662 221627Z

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S E C R E T ROME 18662

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS1
TAGS: IT, PINT
SUBJ: CONVERSATION WITH DEFENSE MINISTER FORLANI

1. SUMMARY. IN A MEETING AT THE RESIDENCE WITH DEFENSE MINISTER FORLANI ON DECEMBER 18, I INDICATED THE CONCERN WHICH IS SHARED BY THE UNITED STATES AND ITALY'S EUROPEAN ALLIES REGARDING THE PROBLEMS WHICH WOULD BE CREATED BY A COMMUNIST ENTRY INTO GOVERNMENT IN ITALY. FORLANI IS COMMITTED TO OPPOSING THE PCI AND RENEWING AND REFORMING THE DC. HE IS KEEPING IN CLOSE TOUCH WITH PARTY SECRETARY ZACCAGNINI WITH A VIEW TOWARD POSSIBLY RESUMING THE PARTY SECRETARYSHIP. FORLANI BELIEVES THAT THE DE MARTINO VISIT IN THE US SHOULD BE USEFUL. HE IS CONCERNED THAT THE MANCINI WING OF THE PSI COULD PROVOKE A GOVERNMENT CRISIS AND SEEK EARLY ELECTIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. IN A CORDIAL AND FRANK DISCUSSION WITH DEFENSE MINISTER FORLANI ON DECEMBER 18, I BRIEFED THE MINISTER REGARDING MY WASHINGTON CONVERSATIONS WITH THE PRESIDENT AND THE SECRETARY. I EXPLAINED THAT BOTH INDICATED THEIR CONCERN OVER THE ITALIAN POLITICAL SITUATION. THE PCI THREAT POSES A NUMBER OF PROBLEMS FOR ITALY'S EUROPEAN ALLIES AND THE UNITED STATES. AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION WOULD FIND IT DIFFICULT TO SUPPORT THE NATO ALLIANCE IF ITALY HAD COMMUNISTS IN ITS GOVERNMENT. FORLANI REPLIED THAT HE REALIZED THIS ONLY TOO WELL. HE IS ABSOLUTELY OPPOSED TO COMMUNISTS IN GOVERNMENT. HE FEELS THEIR ROLE MUST BE LIMITED TO THAT OF AN OPPOSITION PARTY.

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 ROME 18662 221627Z

3. IF FORLANI ASSUMES THE SECRETARYSHIP OF THE DC, IT WILL BE

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006

BECAUSE OF HIS SENSE OF LOYALTY TO THE PARTY AND THE NATION.
HE CONCURS IN THE NEED FOR REFORM AND REJUVENATION OF THE PARTY
WITH NEW ISSUES AND NEW FACES. WITHOUT THESE THE PARTY WOULD
SUFFER FURTHER LOSSES. HE SAID SOME PROGRESS IS BEING MADE. HE
IS STAYING IN TOUCH WITH ZACCAGNINI AND FEELS THAT ZACCAGNINI
IS DOING AS WELL AS CAN BE EXPECTED GIVEN THE LIMITED DURATION OF
HIS MANDATE. FORLANI SPOKE HIGHLY OF THE RECENTLY FORMED CATHOLIC
GROUP, "COMMUNIONE E LIBERAZIONE. HE FEELS THAT ALTHOUGH ITS
ADHERENTS ARE IDEALISTIC AND SOMETIMES VOLATILE, AS YOUTH IS APT
TO BE, OVERALL COMMUNIONE E LIBERAZIONE IS A RALLYING POINT FOR
YOUNG PEOPLE WHICH THE DC NEEDS BADLY. OTHER STEPS, SUCH AS TRYING
TO LIMIT FACTIONALISM, ARE BEING TAKEN. MOST OF THE PARTY'S
EFFORTS ARE BEING SPENT, HOWEVER, ON PREPARING FOR THE CONGRESSES
TO BE HELD IN THE REGIONS AS WELL AS AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL
STARTING MARCH 4.

4. WHEN I ASKED FORLANI ABOUT THE RECENT BISHOP'S CONFERENCE
AFFIRMATION THAT CHRISTIANITY AND MARXISM DON'T MIX, HE REPLIED
THAT THIS GESTURE SHOULD BE HELPFUL TO THE DC. ALTHOUGH SOME
VOTERS MIGHT RESENT THE REASSERTION OF THE CHURCH IN POLITICAL
AFFAIRS, OVERALL IT WOULD BE HELPFUL TO THE DC.

5. FORLANI IS WORKING TO AVOID ANY FURTHER SPLITS IN THE
PARTY SO THAT IF HE SHOULD DECIDE TO TAKE ON THE SECRETARYSHIP,
HE WILL DO IT WITH A MAXIMUM AMOUNT OF SUPPORT. I TOLD HIM OF THE
HIGH REGARD WE HAVE FOR HIM BOTH HERE AND IN WASHINGTON.
I SAID WE WANTED HIM TO KNOW THAT HE COULD CALL ON US WHENEVER
HE THOUGHT WE COULD BE HELPFUL.

6. FORLANI DID NOT LOOK UPON THE RECENT ELECTIONS IN SMALLER
COMMUNITIES AS BEING TOO BRIGHT FOR THE DC. AT THE SAME TIME
THERE WAS NO BRIGHT SIDE FOR THE PCI EITHER, THE SOCILISTS
WERE THE ONLY GAINERS. WE TALKED ABOUT THE DE MARTINO VISIT AND
THE PROBLEMS OF THE PSI. FORLANI THINKS THE DE MARTINO INVITA-
TION IS USEFUL. HE HOPES IT WILL HAVE A POSITIVE EFFECT. IN
TALKING WITH MANCINI JUST RECENTLY, MANCINI HAD SAID THERE IS A
POSSIBILITY OF A GOVERNMENT CRISIS BETWEEN THE PSI AND DC CONG-
RESSES. I ASKED FORLANI IF HE KNEW WHY THE SOCIALISTS WOULD WANT
TO CREATE A CRISIS. HE REPLIED THAT MANCINI SEEMS TO BELIEVE A
GOVERNMENTAL CRISIS WOULD CREATE A GREAT AMOUNT OF TENSION
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WHICH WOULD BE BRUISING FOR THE DC. SECONDLY, THE PSI MIGHT
AVOID THE CRISIS IF THEY COULD GAIN SOME ADDITIONAL IMPORTANT
SEATS IN THE CABINET. THIRDLY, ELEMENTS IN THE PSI HOPE THAT
EARLY ELECTIONS WOULD WORK TO THEIR PARTY'S BENEFIT.

7. FORLANI INDICATED HE WOULD LIKE TO SEE ME AGAIN BEFORE
CHRISTMAS. THE PROSPECTS REMAIN HIGH THAT HE COULD BE THE NEXT
PARTY SECRETARY. IF HE IS ABLE TO GAIN THE SECRETARYSHIP WITH

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Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006

A FREE HAND BY THE VOTE OF A HEAVY MAJORITY OF THE CONGRESS
RATHER THAN BY THE DICTATION OF A FEW PARTY BOSSES, THE DC COULD
BE ON THE WAY TOWARD IMPROVING ITS CHANCES AGAINST THE PCI.VOLPE

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